

**Sermon preached by The Rev. Charles Rowins at St. Christopher-by-the-Sea,
Gibson Island, Maryland, 9th Sunday after Pentecost, July 29, 2018.**

I want to start this morning with today's Psalm (**Psalm 145:10-19**). It's a beautiful passage, grounded in a simple but profound love and respect for the Lord. I don't know about you, but when I read this psalm or hear it read, I want to know more about this Lord. Clearly the author loves the Lord because the author is convinced that the Lord loves him or her. Who wouldn't want to know more about this Lord, praised so highly by the author of this psalm?

You and I have these kinds of experiences, but at a less impressive level.

"You wouldn't believe whom I met last night?"

"Why? Who was it?"

"Manny Machado."

"Really? What's he like?"

"Well, he's a really nice young man. I was very impressed."

"Wow. Do you think I could meet him some time?"

"Sure. I'll see what I can do."

A silly illustration perhaps. The point is simply that you and I respond to testimonials. The author of today's Psalm is providing testimony that there is a God and this God is a loving God. The author has experienced this God, and wants to bear witness to this God. And when the author does so in a deeply moving manner, we want to know more. We love a good story, and this Psalm tells a good story.

And more than a story, this Psalm points to the Truth. And we want this also. Not just a story, but the Truth. "The Lord is near to those who call upon him, to all who call upon him faithfully." Can the Truth be this close? Really? I definitely want to know more.

And so we drill down into this testimony. And what we discover is more testimony. We have an experience described in the Old Testament (**II Kings 4:42-44**) whereby a hundred people are fed with some barley and corn, with food left over. And then we have an experience in the New Testament (**John 6:1-21**) of Jesus feeding five thousand people with five loaves and two fish, again with food left over. No wonder that St. Paul in his letter to the Ephesians (**Ephesians 3:14-21**) suggests that the love of Christ surpasses knowledge.

All of this makes me curious. I can't get it out of my system. It's as if my friend who knows Manny Machado hasn't gotten back to me about meeting Manny. What do I do? Well, I remind my friend of his promise to see what he could do. I don't give up. I pursue.

That's what you and I do on Sunday mornings. We pursue. And that's what you and I do any time when we pray. We pursue. And that's what you and I do when we lash out at God for either doing something we didn't want Him to do, or not doing something we did want Him to do. We pursue. Bible study is pursuit. Reading, exploring, writing, thinking, watching, listening, serving. All of these activities are pursuits. We're after something. Maybe something as simple as passing the time. But maybe something as profound as seeking to know God more fully.

This morning's Collect captures our pursuit of the Creator. "O God, the protector of all who trust in you, without whom nothing is strong, nothing is holy: Increase and multiply upon us thy mercy, that, thou being our ruler and guide, we may so pass through things temporal, that we finally lose not the things eternal."

Some people pass through things temporal – like life itself – without a sense of the eternal. What a shame? What a loss, especially if the Eternal is available. The "availability" of God is what this morning's Psalm describes. When we fall, the Lord lifts up. When we are hungry, the Lord provides. When we are in any kind of need, the Lord satisfies. Who wouldn't want this kind of support and assurance?

Well, there are some, maybe many, who would love this kind of support and assurance, but don't know where to look. It's great to talk about "availability," but where, who, how?

For you and me, the answer is Jesus of Nazareth. He is God available. What better way to provide support and assurance than to enter our lives as a fellow human being? He is born as we are born. He grows up as we grow up. He gets in trouble as we get in trouble. He dies as we will die. And, even more impressive, he will rise from the dead to enter yet another realm of existence, as we will.

In today's Gospel, the disciples are terrified by a storm. In the midst of their uncertainty and fear, Jesus appears and says to them, "It is I; do not be afraid."

This is the kind of assurance that the Risen Christ offers you and me. This is the kind of assurance that we crave in an always uncertain and often fearful world. This is God Incarnate. This is God available. This is the Lord today's Psalm describes so beautifully. "The eyes of all wait upon you, O Lord, and you give them their food in due season."

This is the Lord St. Paul speaks of to the Ephesians. "I pray that, according to the riches of his glory, he may grant that you may be strengthened in your inner being with power through his Spirit, and that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith, as you are being rooted and grounded in love."

It's as if God says to you and me, "I have a deal, I have a relationship, that you shouldn't refuse. If you prepare the ground for planting, I will provide the seed with the potential to change your life. And if you nourish that seed, you will experience growth beyond your greatest imagination. And I won't put the watering responsibility all on you. I will be with you, including those times when you are not with me. Availability, you see, is my middle name."

Those of you who plant vegetable gardens sometimes are surprised by the results of your planting. And so are your neighbors, causing them to ask, "How did you do that? I've tried to raise those same vegetables for years without success. What's your secret?"

To which we would not respond, "Oh, it's something I invented myself." No, chances are that we would attribute our success to others, people who taught us and showed us. We learned from others, people who had faced similar challenges and found success.

This is the spirit of this morning's Psalm. "How did you do that? How do you face challenge? Where do you find the confidence to endure hardship? The psalmist says, "Try the Lord. He is faithful in all his words and merciful in all his deeds. The Lord upholds all those who fall; He lifts up those who are bowed down. He is near to those who call upon him, to all who call upon Him faithfully."

In short, give Him a try, and you will find that not only do you receive mercy, but that there is mercy to share with others. "There is a boy here who has five barley loaves and two fish. But what are they among so many people?" Well, you would be surprised. Jesus put it this way: "It is I, do not be afraid." Amen.

